

Nollywood wows Uganda

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What's Nigerian, comes in threes, and keeps Ugandans entertained? And it's only safe on the stage...



Bob Ejike, keeping audiences spellbound.

The answer: Prof. Bob Ejike, Osita Iheme and Chinedu Ikedieze (the petit comical duo popularly known as Aki and Pawpaw), who took Uganda by storm in an unprecedented tour that combined music and comedy, and kept packed Ugandan audiences spellbound.

The events were organized by Paragon Limited, as a sequel to their Nigeria-Uganda film *Roses in The Rain*, which featured Zack Orji and Clarion Chukwurah, among other great Nigerian actors along with stage hardened Ugandan actors. Katogo (Green banana, a Ugandan staple) 2008, as the artistic exposition was tagged, turned out to be one of the biggest shows in East African history, attracting more than 200,000 fans.

The spectacle commenced with the arrival of Aki and Pawpaw at Entebbe Airport on 23rd January. The two famous Nigerian comedians were mobbed by hundreds of excited Ugandan fans, journalists, TV cameramen and boda boda (motorcycle taxi) riders who noisily escorted them on the one-hour drive from the airport to the Nigerian High Commission in the exclusive Nakasero Reserve, shaking Kampala, and rousing other citizens to the arrival of their favorite comedians.

Bob Ejike, who had been running Probe Studios Kampala and trying to prod a Ugandan film resurgence for over a year, had arrived earlier at the Nigerian High Commission to further brief the Charge d' Affairs, Ahmed Abubakar on the weekend programme, and was still in the diplomat's office when the crowd arrived.

It took the full strength of the embassy security men to keep the crowd outside the mission premises.

24th January saw the Nollywood trio at a home for children afflicted with HIV, in Entebbe, making speeches of hope,

entertaining and carrying the AIDS children, with much the same hullabaloo as the previous day.

The Imperial Royale Hotel was also venue of the expensive V.I.P show that took place on 25th January. The display in the restricted, but packed hall featured several Ugandan curtain raisers, comics, clowns and comedy groups, and East African musical greats like the genial youth cult figure Bobby Wine, and Ragga Dee, Mega Dee, Ronald Mayinja and Faridah.

But the audience was waiting for something foreign, exotic and Nigerian, and they got it when Bob Ejike and his practiced singers and choreographers mounted the stage to launch his new album that is headlining in most countries in the continent, entitled *Bob Ejike Recharged*. The spectators went wild when the Nigerian actor sang his popular *Nambi*, (a love story involving a Nigerian man and a Ugandan woman), in their local Luganda language. Then came the icing of the cake, Aki and Pawpaw, first miming to popular contemporary Nigerian songs, then going into their hilarious comedy sketches on the dangers of HIV/Aids.

They left the Ugandan VIPs nursing cracked ribs.

26th January was the date for Jinja the historic town of the source of the River Nile about 100km from Kampala. The venue was the stadium and it was jammed to capacity. Sunday 27th January brought the Nigerian celebrities and their Ugandan host artistes to Kampala's Nakivubo Stadium. Getting the divas in was a huge problem as surging fans blocked all entrances in their bid to see the Nigerian stars they watch on video and TV with their own eyes, however strong security initiative eventually brought them on stage, leaving not a few black eyes among the audience. Pandemonium broke loose when Bob Ejike and Aki and Pawpaw sang Higher, from Ejike's Recharged.

In a scene reminiscent of a Michael Jackson entry on stage, the crowd charged excitedly unto the stage, screaming, pushing, kicking, elbowing, and crushing themselves. The video cameramen from Nollywood took to their heels, and the police and army had to embark on an instant rescue operation in the crowd to save a dozen children whose mothers had fainted from being mashed. The children were kept on the stage, which was the only part of the stadium that was safe. The situation was much the same at Arua, at last the Ugandan people who are one of the highest consumers of Nigerian film went away satisfied that what they had been watching were no film tricks but raw natural talent from the third biggest movie industry in the world.

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